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Cold Chain Management Crucial to U.S. Food Exports

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Approved By:

Erik Hansen

Prepared By:

Alice Gibbons

Report Highlights:

Mexico is the United States' second largest trade partner of agricultural products. High quality U.S. good products supported by solid cold chain management are key to the success of a growing market for U.S. food exports to Mexico. Many players are involved in this process, including producers, shippers, handlers, as well as the end consumers. Educating on the importance of Cold Chain will continue to assure that U.S. food exports maintain a strong market share in Mexico.

General Information:

Whether you are involved in production, sales and distribution, handling, or you are the end consumer of food products, the topic of cold chain is one of which you should be aware. So, what is cold chain? **Cold Chain** is the process of preserving the quality and safety of agricultural products starting from food's natural (or processed) state through final consumption. Cold chain has a profound impact not only on food safety, and commerce, but also on the overall health and wellness of a society. This issue takes center stage with several prominent agricultural products, whether fresh or processed.

Without cold chain education and awareness, not only is food safety threatened but the trade of food products is hindered as a result of poor food quality at the point of sale. In order to increase U.S. food exports to Mexico, an increased awareness and accountability for solid cold chain management must be facilitated. The preservation of food products starting from production until reaching consumption is essential to food safety as well as overall success in sales. Food Safety is in the hands of many players, from producers, packers, handlers, transporters, and distributors, to homemakers and the end consumers. The USDA reports that 76 million people are affected annually by contaminated food.

Monitoring and maintaining temperature control of food from the moment it is produced is imperative. From the moment fruit and vegetables are plucked from the bush or tree, milk is milked from a cow, beef is taken from a bovine, or an egg is hatched from a chicken, a safe temperature must be ensured on a product-basis. This leads us to the "Farm to Fork" concept. For example, the cold chain process for dairy products starts at the dairy farm (farm) and ends with the consumer (fork). Cold Chain involves all of the elements and activities needed to ensure the quality and safety of food products. The use of refrigeration takes priority in the "Farm to Fork" concept. Given that cold temperature slows down the growth rate of harmful microorganisms and enzymes, refrigeration is crucial in food handling and safety because it is the process of removing heat and maintaining a safe temperature (based on the product's unique requirements) thus maintaining its quality and safety. Without temperature control, food is vulnerable and unprotected from the invasion of harmful bacteria and enzymes that can transform it from a healthy and essential nutrient provider to a dangerous and unwanted invader.

Economically speaking, cold chain management plays a major role in supporting a stable economy in the sector of agribusiness. According to the experts, 30 percent of the total production of many food products is lost due to poor handling and cold chain management. Without an integral and safe food infrastructure in place supported by cold chain management, not only is the overall health of a society is put at risk, but also consumers will no longer trust and invest in the system. With respect to U.S. exports of agricultural products to Mexico, cold chain vigilance is imperative to maintaining consumer confidence and safety, as well as assuring success of U.S. food products in the Mexican market.

Increased demand for U.S. agricultural products is linked to the quality of the products, which can only be assured through a commitment to cold chain management starting with producers and carried out by transporters, distributors, handlers, and ending with the end consumer.



ATO Mexico City has engaged in active efforts to educate key players in the food industry in Mexico on cold chain management. Most recently, ATO has hosted a series of cold chain seminars: June 17, 2010, Exphotel Cancun; August 31, 2010 in Mexico DF; September 3, 2010 in Guadalajara; and September 7, 2010 in Cancun. These seminars were tailored to food

manufacturers and its partners, such as quality managers, buyers, distributors, and other groups involved in the process of cold chain management within the food industry. The event was designed to educate on cold chain management and on how to assure food safety.



The seminars were given by two experts on the topic of Cold Chain, Jose Manuel Samperio and Saul Sanchez. Some of the highlights of the seminars included the Farm to Fork concept, refrigeration and freezing techniques, temperature abuses among several food product categories including meat, poultry, dairy, fruits, and vegetables, and on reducing and management risks to assure food safety.



The ATO office will be offering additional cold chain training in the near future. Please see our website for upcoming seminars at <http://www.mexico-usda.com/>



For More Information:

FAS/Mexico Web Site: We are available at www.mexico-usda.com or visit the FAS headquarters' home page at www.fas.usda.gov for a complete selection of FAS worldwide agricultural reporting.

FAS/Mexico YouTube Channel: Catch the latest videos of FAS Mexico at work <http://www.youtube.com/user/ATOMexicoCity>

Useful Mexican Web Sites: Mexico's equivalent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (SAGARPA) can be found at www.sagarpa.gob.mx and Mexico's equivalent to the U.S. Department of Commerce (SE) can be found at www.economia.gob.mx. These web sites are mentioned for the readers' convenience but USDA does NOT in any way endorse, guarantee the accuracy of, or necessarily concur with, the information contained on the mentioned sites.